

# ***The Electric Mercury***

**U.S. Army Medical Command Electronic News Summary, June 2003**

**For more on these and other important stories, see June 2003 printed issue of The Mercury.  
This is a service of the Public Affairs Office, Headquarters MEDCOM.**

## **Medical personnel answer the call in Iraq**

Military medical people were well-prepared for Operation Iraqi Freedom, says assistant secretary of defense for health affairs. More than 500 troops were treated for wounds, injuries or illnesses, and lives were saved by having surgical teams deployed close to the fighting. Treating Iraqi prisoners and civilians, too, U.S. military hospitals reached 50 percent of patient capacity. Medics often came under fire themselves in helping wounded. "It's scary, people can die," a surgeon commented. "It gets the adrenaline pumping – like being mortared. You've got to stay calm and remember your training – just like any job in the Army. If you're an Army doc, there's no place you'd rather be than right here." As combat ended, Army medical units shifted to relieving the suffering of Iraqi civilians and helping repair the country's medical system. (With a sidebar article about an Iraqi who is married to an AMEDD member and who volunteered as an interpreter with U.S. forces in Iraq. Inside the paper is a page of photos from Operation Iraqi Freedom.)

## **Researchers find enzyme may counter nerve agents**

Army researchers discover that an enzyme found in the body, butyrylcholinesterase, appears to be an effective pretreatment for nerve-agent exposure. Administered in an appropriate dose, it protects people from nerve-agent exposure for up to two weeks. In studies, it has protected animals from lethal doses of all the nerve agents tested and there were no side effects. Researchers at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and the Army Medical Research Institute of Chemical Defense now await the okay to go into human clinical trials. Another item in the research stage at WRAIR is a decontaminating sponge impregnated with enzymes that grab organophosphates before they can harm.

## **Medics meet challenges on many fronts**

"The reach of your AMEDD through the excellence of the people at all levels is simply extraordinary," writes LTG James B. Peake, Army Surgeon General and MEDCOM commander, in his monthly column. Peake praises the courage, competence and compassion of battlefield medics; forward-deployed surgical care; and rapid evacuation through combat support hospitals, to Europe and then home to a world-class sustaining-base health system. He also cites the training base; research labs; the Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine; the Regional Medical Commands; DENCOM; VETCOM; the Reserve Components; and the AMEDD's 27,000 civilian employees.

Other important stories in this month's edition of the *Mercury* include:

- Nominations for 2003 Excalibur Awards are due by the end of September. The awards recognize team and organization excellence within the AMEDD.
- AMEDD enlisted soldiers can apply for warrant officer status, with training as veterinary-services technicians or health-services maintenance technicians.
- Special Operations Command seeks male 91W soldiers to become Special Operations Combat Medics. Details are in the RETAIN system (RMB Message 03-07c).
- Fisher Houses at Army hospitals provide lodging for families of combat casualties.
- DoD officials say depleted-uranium projectiles give the U.S. too great a combat edge to give up and that there is no good evidence DU is a significant health hazard.
- William Beaumont Army Medical Center and a Fort Hood, Texas, clinic are sites for Army prototype training in primary-care optimization.
- Integrated Service of ROK Military Health Care Personnel Program marks 50th anniversary. Over 400 Korean medical personnel have completed the six-month program.
- Reserve dentist CPT Lisa Franklin is deployed at Perkins Dental Clinic, Fort Hood, Texas. Patriotic colleagues are keeping her practice going in her absence.
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center ear-nose-and-throat team helps Hondurans.
- LTC Ronald Walton, chief of experimental surgery at the Army Institute of Surgical Research, is one of 35 veterinarians for the 1,150-mile 2003 Iditarod dogsled race.
- COL David A. Rubenstein, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center commander, wins American College of Healthcare Executives' leadership award.
- MEDCOM journalists win several awards in Army's annual Keith L. Ware contest.
- Photos: retired COL Jim Prescott and retired MG Floyd Baker discuss H-13 medevac helicopter at AMEDD Museum; COL Peter Zagursky, 48th Combat Support Hospital, extracts civilian's tooth in Afghanistan; Paul Sledzik, National Museum of Health and Medicine, shows cast of bone from Civil War amputee; Mark Howell, Patricia Burr and Elfie Neber, Wuerzburg, Germany, MEDDAC, perform in award-winning public service messages; medical-evacuation Stryker vehicle awaits next test at Fort Irwin, Calif.
- Commentary: "Clinical trials advance medical knowledge," by Michael E. Dukes, describes rewards of participation in a drug study at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.
- Physical training builds toughness but overdoing it may damage health, warns MAJ Steven H. Bullock of U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine.